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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 000537

SIPDIS

SIPDIS, NEA/IR, EUR/AGS, EEB

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IR GM

SUBJECT: IRAN: DFM SAFARI VISIT TO BERLIN

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons
1.4(b)/(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe and the Americas Mehdi Safari made his first official visit to Berlin April 17-18 to hold discussions with the MFA and Interior Ministry. Safari's visit has been characterized as "nothing revolutionary" by MFA officials. He delivered to the MFA a letter from Iranian FM Mottaki regarding an upcoming "new proposal", reviewed Iran's efforts in Afghanistan, and informed Germany of Iran's extradition request for a German citizen linked to the Kurdish-Iranian PKK-affiliate PJAK. Safari also conducted a number of public diplomacy events, including a meeting with German businessmen, a roundtable with senior German political figures, and a press conference. His assertion that Germany's reduction in trade with Iran is not hurting his country attracted international press coverage. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe and the Americas Mehdi Safari visited Berlin April 16-17 for meetings with MFA State Secretary Reinhard Silberberg, Interior Ministry State Secretary August Hanning, as well as for a number of public diplomacy events. Safari, who has served in senior IRI MFA positions since 1992, succeeded Saeed Jalili, Iran's current chief nuclear negotiator. In an April 23 conversation with Iran Watcher, MFA Iran Desk Officer Deike Potzel said the Iranian Embassy had "desperately" insisted on Safari meeting with German FM Steinmeier three weeks earlier; he was granted a meeting with Silberberg instead.

¶3. (C) MFA contacts have described Safari's visit as "nothing revolutionary" and largely covering Iran's normal talking points. Safari delivered a letter to Silberberg from Iranian FM Mottaki, stating that Iran is preparing a "proposal" that will be circulated to other countries; according to Potzel, the letter did not offer any details as to the proposal's substance. Potzel, clearly unimpressed, added that the letter was type-written and "not even personalized" and surmised that similar letters had been distributed to other western FMs. Safari also discussed Iran's efforts in Afghanistan, particularly on counternarcotics, with Silberberg. On the nuclear issue, Silberberg told Safari that Iran is going the wrong way and that Iran should consider the P5 1 incentive offer very carefully. Safari informed Silberberg that Iran had posted an extradition request for German citizen Rahman Haji Ahmadi, the self-proclaimed leader of the Kurdish-Iranian PKK-affiliated militant group PJAK. Potzel noted that Germany will not comply with the request due to Iran's use of the death penalty.

¶4. (C) According to Iranian press reports, Safari's meeting with Interior Ministry State Secretary August Hanning focused on counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. Safari also met with CDU Foreign Policy Spokesman Eckart von Klaeden and focused on Afghanistan. Safari also conducted a number of public diplomacy activities, including a meeting with "high-level" German businessman, as well as a press conference, during which he reviewed Iran's expanding trade relations with Asian countries, and encouraged German businessmen not to "lose the (Iranian) market", noting that Iran is ready to purchase products currently supplied by Germany elsewhere and that "it will be very hard to come back." Regarding the decrease of German trade with Iran, Safari said, "I didn't say that we are suffering... maybe you are suffering" and repeated Iran's readiness to "deal with the others for the same goods, for the same qualities, and for the same projects." (COMMENT: Safari's remarks -- widely reported in the German press -- were clearly intended to reinforce long-standing concerns among German small and medium-size exporters that EU sanctions and other "autonomous" efforts to curtail Iran-related trade will result in the permanent loss of business opportunities to competitors in China, Russia, and other countries. END COMMENT.)

¶5. (C) Safari also participated in a Koerber Foundation-hosted roundtable discussion, attended by senior MFA, Chancellery, and Bundestag officials. The foundation's Berlin Office Director, Thomas Paulsen, told PolMil Off that Safari had emphasized Iran's "very active" engagement in Afghanistan, noting that Iran's high level of economic activity is a means to stabilize Afghanistan. Safari was also critical of the UK's stance that the Taliban has "good" and "bad" elements, saying that there is "no such thing as good or reconcilable Taliban." Safari denied that Iran was seeking to develop missiles with longer ranges that could, for example, strike Europe. Paulsen also characterized

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Safari as "typically strident in talking about Israel"; on the U.S. however, Paulsen said Safari had been moderate: it is "clear" that Iran is seeking an opening with the U.S., said Paulsen.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Safari's visit is notable for the increase of public diplomacy-related efforts (compared to previous DFM visits to Berlin) and, particularly, the press coverage thereof. Mission Germany will continue to monitor Iranian Embassy public diplomacy and media efforts, particularly those directed at the German business community. END COMMENT.

TIMKEN JR